

20 February 1968

Add Spices as Plot Thickens

CPYRGHT BY DON COOK

PARIS—Ever since President Kennedy was assassinated, the French probably more than any other people have remained obsessed with the idea that it must have been a plot—that it could never have been the work of one only psychopath thinking it up all by himself and never telling anybody what he intended to do.

One of the reasons for this French obsession is that if a Frenchman wants to do away with somebody, he immediately heads for the local bistro and asks a couple of pals to help him—after which they all settle down to elaborating a scheme of intricate maneuver and wild diversionary complications.

The French public is currently being entertained with two classic examples of this mentality at work. The first is the Ben Barka case—the kidnapping and apparent murder of a Moroccan political leader with the connivance of agents of the French Se-

Don Cook is chief of The Times' Paris Bureau.

cret Police. The second case is a trial now in progress of no fewer than 15 men who narrowly failed in an attempt to assassinate President De Gaulle in the summer of 1964 with a radio-controlled bomb planted in a huge flower vase.

The Ben Barka case is particularly interesting because the events of this sordid assassination plot somewhat resemble in a general way the favorite French theory about the alleged plot to assassinate President Kennedy.

According to this French theory, certain agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Dallas police wanted to get rid of President Kennedy because he was too liberal. So the Dallas police then put Lee Harvey Oswald up to killing the President, and the FBI deliberately withheld from the Secret Service the fact that Oswald was present in Dallas—a nut who had Marxist views and had lived in Russia and who ought to have been under surveillance during the Presidential visit. After that, the Dallas police conveniently arranged to have Jack Ruby, who owed them a service, charge into the police station and shoot Os-

wald so he would never be able to talk! Such was the French theory about the Kennedy assassination, and it got wide airing in print and conversation and remains imbedded in French minds today.

In the case of Ben Barka, a young liberal Moroccan politician living in exile is about to make a deal to return to his country and resume political activity. So the Moroccan police contact some of their old pals in the French Secret Service and work up a plot to do away with him. French secret agents use a decoy ruse to pick him up on the street in broad daylight in Paris, and then turn him over to a Moroccan gangster who tortures him, murders him, and disappears completely from France after it's all over.

Then when it becomes known that French secret agents were involved and the case blows up into a public scandal, a key witness who allegedly was present when the wretched Ben Barka was murdered first wanders around the streets of Paris and is photographed outside the Paris police headquarters—after which he commits suicide just as the police are about to break into his apartment.

The Ben Barka affair is a thoroughly sordid mess and a particular black eye for President De Gaulle and the image which he seeks to create of a rigorously upright and righteous government firmly under his personal domination and control. But being plot-minded, the French naturally are not even content to rest with the existing facts. They add other theories about the Ben Barka affair in order to be able to blame somebody else. At



Cook

first the Moroccans were the whipping-boys, and undoubtedly they either paid or persuaded somebody in France to get Ben Barka. But that still does not absolve the French secret police from having staged the affair.

So, of course, another whipping-boy had to be thought up, and now we have French Minister of the Interior Roger Frey, whose department is responsible for the police, solemnly asserting that he could not rule out that the American CIA might be mixed up in the case. If such an accusation by a member of the French government were not so ludicrous and laughable, it ought to be made a matter of formal protest by the United States.

The poor old CIA probably wishes it had some operators who could think up plots the way the French do.

FOIAb3b